

Prayers, Affirmations of Faith, Prayers of Confession, Litanies

CALLS TO WORSHIP AND OPENING PRAYERS

Opening Prayer

Lord God, you are a redeeming God.

It is not your desire that any of your children should suffer.

You hear their cries and you come from heaven to save.

As we gather to remember your saving purposes for all who are oppressed,
give us minds, hearts and wills to hear your word to us, and then to live it.

We pray this in the name of Christ the Savior. Amen.

Eunice T. McGarrah, A Study of the Belhar Confession and its Accompanying Letter (Louisville: Office of Theology and Worship), p. 6.

Call to Worship

People will come from east and west, from north and south,
and will eat in the kingdom of God.

**Indeed, some are last who will be first,
and some are first who will be last.**

Eunice T. McGarrah, A Study of the Belhar Confession and its Accompanying Letter (Louisville: Office of Theology and Worship), p. 13.

Call to Worship

Come, Lord God, to receive our worship. Come, Lord Jesus, to receive our praise. Come,
Holy Spirit, to receive our thanks. Come, eternal three-in-one God, come where we are
gathered to celebrate our unity as your body, the church.

**We share one faith and are of one soul and one mind, which belong solely and
wholly to you.**

We are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup.

**We confess one name above all other names; we are obedient to one Lord, who frees
us from the tyranny and hatefulness of the world.**

We share one hope, one comfort, one goal.

**We are one people, united--despite any noticeable differences--by our faith in you,
Lord Jesus.**

We are one people, united by your love and mercy to stand against any power that would
try to tear us apart.

**We are one people, united in blessing and in suffering, united in joy and in sorrow,
united in strength and in weakness. Receive our praise!**

Lisa Vander Wal. Used with permission.

Opening Prayer

God of the ages,

you call the church to keep watch in the world
and to discern the signs of the times.
Grant us the wisdom which your Spirit bestows,
that with courage we may proclaim your prophetic word,
and complete the work that you have set before us;
through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever. Amen.

International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Inc

Opening Prayer

Holy God, one in grace, one glory, one in love –
you call us to love and serve you as one people,
united in heart, mind, spirit, and strength.
Help us to love one another, living in unity and peace,
working together in your Spirit for the good of all;
through Jesus Christ, our reconciler and redeemer.

Eunice T. McGarrah, A Study of the Belhar Confession and its Accompanying Letter (Louisville: Office of Theology and Worship), p. 36.

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION

Invitation:

The gift and obligation of unity is given and commanded by God for the Christian church. Together we confess that the one worldwide community of believers is not united:

Prayer of Confession:

God, forgive us. Our communion is not always visible to the world. Sometimes we allow threats to unity to enter the church, making it hard to see that we are your community. We act as though we do not need each other. We do not always love one another. We do not know and bear one another's burdens. We fail to build each other up. We do not always give ourselves willingly and joyfully to one another. Forgive us, and strengthen us so that we may live in the unity that you grant us.

Assurance of Forgiveness

One: By Christ's work, we are reconciled and united with God and with one another.
Thanks be to God for the Good News:

All: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen.

Barbara Hedges-Goettl. Used with permission.

Call to Confession:

Although God has given the church the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, we fall short of God's call to be salt of the earth and light of the world:

Prayer (unison):

God, our fears and prejudices run deep. Sometimes we can only see our own point of view. We stick with those who are like us, rarely venturing outside our comfort zones. We do not hear those crying for justice and true peace. We blame those who are suffering and in need, instead of standing by them. We deny the power of your gospel to unite us with those who are different from us. Lord, give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Open us to new possibilities of life for all of your people, and use us to enact the new life given in Christ.

Assurance of Forgiveness

One: God's life-giving Word and Spirit conquer the powers of sin and death. Thanks be to God for the Good News:

All: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Barbara Hedges-Goettl. Used with permission.

Call to Confession:

God calls the church to follow him, standing by those who suffer and are in need, so that justice may roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Let us confess the ways in which we do not follow God's call.

Prayer

One: O God, you bring justice to the oppressed and give bread to the hungry.

All: Forgive us when we do not follow you.

One: You free the prisoner and restore sight to the blind.

All: Forgive us when we do not follow you.

One: You support the downtrodden and protect the stranger.

All: Forgive us when we do not follow you.

One: You block evildoers and help orphans and widows.

All: Forgive us when we do not follow you.

One: You stand against injustice. You stand with the wronged.

All: Forgive us when we do not follow you.

One: You condemn those who seek their own interests, controlling and harming others.

All: Forgive us when we do not follow you.

One: You bring about justice and true peace among people.

All: God, forgive us when we do not follow you. Grant us your grace.

Embolden us that, as your people, we may stand where you stand.

Assurance of Forgiveness

One: God's life-giving Word and Spirit enable us to live in a new obedience, opening new possibilities of life for society and the world. Thanks be to God for the Good News:

All: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven

Barbara Hedges-Goettl. Used with permission.

Prayer of Confession

Almighty God,

you poured your Spirit upon gathered disciples

creating bold tongues, open ears,

and a new community of faith.

We confess that we hold back the force of your Spirit among us.

We do not listen for your word of grace,

speak the good news of your love,

or live as a people made one in Christ.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Transform our timid lives by the power of your Spirit,

and fill us with a flaming desire to be your faithful people,

doing your will for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Book of Common Worship (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1993), p. 343. Reprinted by permission.

Eternal God, our judge and redeemer,
we confess that we have tried to hide from you,
for we have done wrong.

We have lived for ourselves,
and apart from you.

We have turned from our neighbors,
and refused to bear the burdens of others.

We have ignored the pain of the world,
and passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed.

In your great mercy forgive our sins

and free us from selfishness,
that we may choose your will
and obey your commandments;
through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Book of Common Worship (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1993), p. 54.

AFFIRMATIONS OF FAITH

Affirmation of Faith #1

The three parts of this litany may be used separately or in flexible combinations.

a.

One: We believe that unity is both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ.

Many: Through the work of God's Spirit, unity is a binding force.

One: At the same time, unity must also be earnestly pursued and sought.

Many: We must be continually built up to attain this unity.

One: Our unity must become visible to the world.

Many: Separation and hatred between people and groups is sin, already conquered by

Christ. **One:** Anything threatening our unity has no place in the church.

Many: We commit ourselves to resisting anything that threatens our unity.

One: The unity of the people of God is active and made manifest.

All: Thanks be to God.

b.

Group One: The communion of saints, called from the entire human family, is united by God.

Group Two: As the people of God, we love one another.

Group One: We experience, practice, and pursue community with one another.

Group Two: We give ourselves willingly and joyfully to one another.

Group One: We are a benefit and blessing to one another.

Group Two: We share one faith and have one calling.

Group One: We are one body, and are of one soul and mind.

Group Two: We have one God and Father.

Group One: We are filled with one Spirit.

Group Two: We are baptized with one baptism.

Group One: We eat of one bread and drink of one cup.

Group Two: We confess one name and are obedient to one Lord.

Group One: We work for one cause and share one hope.

All: Thanks be to God.

c.

All: Together we confess that God unites us in faith.

Together we come to know the height, and the breadth, and the depth of the love of

Christ.

Together we are built up to the full stature of Christ.

Together we know and bear one another's burdens.

We admonish one another. We comfort one another. We suffer with one another.

We need one another. We build up one another.

Together we pray. Together we serve God in this world.

Together we fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity.

Thanks be to God.

Barbara Hedges-Goettl. Used with permission.

Affirmation of Faith #2

We believe in the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit.

This God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another.

We believe that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ.

We believe that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought.

We believe that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity, and hatred between people and groups is sin.

We believe that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted.

We believe that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

Therefore we reject any doctrine that absolutizes natural diversity in such a way that this hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church.

We reject any doctrine that professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers are alienated from one another and in despair of reconciliation.

We reject any doctrine that denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin.

We reject any doctrine that maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things,

even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

We believe that Jesus is Lord. To the one and only God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

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Affirmation of Faith #3

We believe in God--the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
who gathers, protects and cares for the church.

We believe the church is one worldwide communion of saints,
called from the entire human family.

We believe the church is the single community of believers,
reconciled with God and with one another.

We believe that through the working of God's Spirit, unity is a binding force
and also that we must seek this unity, which must become visible to the world.

We believe that the sin of division, separation and hatred between people and groups
has been conquered by Christ.

We commit ourselves to protecting the unity of the church universal.

We pledge to make this unity active in all of our words, thoughts and deeds.

Barbara Hedges-Goettl. From article 1 and the beginning of Article 2 of the Confession of Belhar. Used with permission.

Affirmation of Faith #4

This statement can be read in unison. One/many or two groups could also alternate lines.

It is through Christ's reconciling work that we are the church, united to God and to other believers.

As the church, we are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world.

We are entrusted with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ.

As the church, we are witnesses by both word and deed.

We proclaim the new heaven and the new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

As the church, we proclaim that God's life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered sin and death.

God conquers irreconciliation, hatred and bitterness.

As the church, God's life-giving Word and Spirit enable us to live in a new obedience,

God opens new possibilities of life for society and the world.
We declare ourselves ready to venture out on the road of obedience and reconciliation--
servants of the God who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people.

Barbara Hedges-Goettl. Used with permission.

From South Africa

Leader: It is not true that this world and its inhabitants are doomed to die and be lost;
All: This is true: for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him shall not die, but have everlasting life.
Leader: It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction;
ALL: This is true: I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
Leader: It is not true that violence and hatred shall have the last word, and that war and destruction have come to stay forever;
ALL: This is true: for to us a child is born, to us a son is given, in whom authority will rest, and whose name will be Prince of Peace.
Leader: It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil that seek to rule the world;
ALL: This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world.
Leader: It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the church, before we can do anything;
ALL: This is true: I will pour out my Spirit on all people, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young people shall see visions, and your old folk dream dreams.
Leader: It is not true that our dreams of liberation of humankind, our dreams of justice, of human dignity, of peace, are not meant for this earth and its history;
ALL: This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that true worshippers shall worship God in Spirit and in truth.

Iona Abbey Worship Book (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2007), p. 20. www.ionabooks.com. Used by permission.

LITANIES

A Prayer for Reconciliation

Across the barriers that divide race from race:

Reconcile us, O Christ, by your cross.

Across the barriers that divide rich from poor:

Reconcile us, O Christ, by your cross.

Across the barriers that divide people of different cultures:

Reconcile us, O Christ, by your cross.

Across the barriers that divide Christians:

Reconcile us, O Christ, by your cross.

Across the barriers that divide men and women, young and old:

Reconcile us, O Christ, by your cross.

Confront us, O Christ, with the hidden prejudices and fears
that deny and betray our prayers.

**Enable us to see the causes of strife,
remove from us all senses of superiority.**

Teach us to grow in unity with all God's children.

To the honor of your name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lisa Vander Wal. Used with permission.

A Prayer for Justice

Lord our God, you have revealed yourself

as One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;

In a world that looks away from injustice,

You cast your eyes on the destitute, the poor, and the wronged;

You have called us to follow you,

to preach good news to the poor,

to proclaim release for the captives

and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set at liberty those who are oppressed

and to proclaim the time of your blessing.

Be present with your church, Lord, as we respond to your call.

Open our eyes to the downtrodden.

Fill us with compassion for the plight of the alien,
the refugee, and the immigrant.

Lead us into ministries that help orphans and widows.

Give us courage to block the paths of the ungodly who exploit the poor.

Set us free from pious exercises that prevent us from the true worship you choose:

Sharing bread with the hungry,

Sharing homes with the homeless,

Sharing clothes with the naked,

Sharing hearts with our own kin.

So may your justice roll down like waters,
your righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

**Lead our footsteps to stand with the poor,
that we might stand with you.**

Have mercy, O God:

Scatter the proud,

Put down the mighty,

Lift up the lowly,

Fill up the hungry,

And send the rich away empty-handed.

And so we pray as Jesus taught his disciples, each in our own language: Our Father...
Lisa Vander Wal. Used with Permission

GENERAL PRAYERS

A Prayer for Peace Brother Roger of Taizé

Lord Christ,
at times we are like strangers on this earth,
Taken aback by all the violence, the harsh oppositions.
Like a gentle breeze, you breathe upon us the Spirit of peace.
Transfigure the deserts of our doubts,
and so prepare us to be bearers of reconciliation wherever you place us,
until the day when a hope of peace dawns in our world. Amen.

The Taizé Office. English translation © The Taizé Community and Anthony Brown, 1966. Published by The Faith Press, London

A Prayer for Racial and Cultural Diversity

O God,
you created all people in your image.
We thank you for the astonishing variety
of races and cultures in this world.
Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of friendship,
and show us your presence in those who differ most from us,
until our knowledge of your love is made perfect
in our love for all your children;
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer (Augsburg Fortress, 1979), p. 840.

A Prayer for the Human Family

O God, you made us in your own image
and redeemed us through Jesus your Son.
Look with compassion on the whole human family,
take away the arrogance and hatred that infect our hearts,
break down the walls that separate us,
unite us in the bonds of love,
and, through our struggle and confusion,
work to accomplish your purposes on earth;

that in your good time,
all nations and races may serve you in harmony
around your heavenly throne;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer is in public domain.

A Prayer for World Unity A prayer from Zaire

O God,
you love justice and you establish peace on earth.
We bring before you the disunity of today's world:
the absurd violence, and the many wars,
which are breaking the courage of the peoples of the world;
militarism and the armaments race,
which are threatening life on the planet;
human greed and injustice,
which breed hatred and strife.
Send your Spirit and renew the face of the earth;
teach us to be compassionate toward the whole human family;
strengthen the will of all those who fight for justice and for peace;
lead all nations into the path of peace
and give us that peace which the world cannot give. Amen.

Textes liturgiques, Louons Dieu et célébrons la vie. © Masamba ma Mpolo et Mengi Kilandamoko, Zaire, 1988

A Prayer for Peace in the Church

God of our lives,
by the power of your Holy Spirit
we have been drawn together by one baptism into one faith,
serving one Lord and Savior.
Do not let us tear away from one another
through division or hard argument.
May your peace embrace our differences,
preserving us in unity,
as one body of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Worship (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1993), p. 809. Reprinted by permission.

A Prayer for Church Unity

O God,
you are the giver of life.
We pray for the church in the whole world.
Sanctify her life, renew her worship,
give power to her witnessing, restore her unity.
Give strength to those who are searching together
for that kind of obedience which creates unity.
Heal the divisions separating your children one from another,
so that they will make fast, with bonds of peace,
the unity which the Spirit gives. Amen.

Textes liturgiques, Louons Dieu et célébrons la vie. © Masamba ma Mpolo et Mengi Kilandamoko, Zaire, 1988

A Prayer for Social Justice

Grant, O God,
that your holy and life-giving Spirit
may so move every human heart,
that the barriers which divide us may crumble,
suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease,
and that, with our divisions healed,
we might live in justice and peace;
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer is in public domain.

Prayer for Unity

Lord, as you have taught us, we bow down before you in all humility, gentleness and patience, supporting each other with love and trying to keep the unity of the spirit by the bonds of peace, that we may become “one body and one spirit,” according to our common calling and vocation.

With one voice, repenting of our divisions, we commit ourselves to working together for reconciliation, peace, and justice, and we stand together in imploring you: help us to live as your disciples, overcoming selfishness and arrogance, hatred and violence; give us the strength to forgive. Inspire our witness in the world, that we might foster a culture of dialogue, and be bearers of the hope which your gospel has implanted in us.

Make us instruments of your peace, so that our homes and communities, our parishes, churches, and nations might resonate more fully with the peace you have long desired to bestow upon us. Amen.

From the World Council of Churches' liturgies for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 2004. Used by permission.

Prayer

Clement, Third Bishop of Rome

We beg you, Lord, to help and defend us.
Deliver the oppressed,
have compassion on the despised,
raise the fallen,
reveal yourself to the needy,
heal the sick,
bring back those who have strayed from you,
feed the hungry,
lift up the weak,
remove the prisoners' chains.
May every nation come to know that you are God alone,
that Jesus is your Son,
that we are your people, the sheep of your pasture.